



CONQUEST OF THE AMAZON

By John Russell Fearn

MORRIS ARNSIDE, subcommittee chief of the World Food Committee, could not quite believe the figures he was studying. Had the year been 1950 he would easily have thought that statisticians had erred in their calculations, or perhaps that there was some double-dealing going on somewhere—but in this year of 1952 there was no room for doubt. His mind ticked their brains no more with calculations. Fearless machines added up everything in the last fraction, and they never made a mistake—day which means the report was all the more mystifying.

"Beyond me," Arnside confessed to himself.

For a moment or two he sat gazing out of the window. Light snow was falling, driven by flurries of bitter wind. It might have been mid-January instead of late May—but then it had been intensely cold for six months and more.

Finally Arnside pressed a button on his desk and his chief assistant and deputy food controller entered.

"Good-morning, Mr. Arnside," he greeted—and Arnside glanced at him with prominent grey eyes.

"I'll be hanged if I do! Sit down, Mathers. There's something I want to talk over with you."

The assistant settled in the chair at the opposite side of the desk and waited. For Morris Arnside to be short-tempered was nothing new. He lived well, ate heartily, took little

exercise, and was always volatile in consequence. But for him to be anxious was definitely unusual.

"I've just had the reports for the first three months of this year," Arnside said at length. "They're staggering! Crops and staple foods are nearly 300 per cent below the normal yield. If things go on at this rate there won't be enough to feed the world's population by the end of the year, and that means we'll have to fall back on synthetic products, something which the majority of people hate."

"Yes, sir," Mathers agreed lamely but not untruthfully.

"I've been trying to think of some reason for this tremendous falling off," Arnside added, his fleshy jaws wagging with the emphasis of his words. "I'll be hanged if I can, though. What has happened to our own British agriculture, the Canadian wheat fields, the United States grain-growing areas? All of these are just dying, man! Dying!"

"It has puzzled me," Mathers responded. "The reports are similar from all sources. The seasons are said to be changing. Take India, for instance, and we're right in the middle of spring. Snowing fast, and looks likely to continue. And the temperature hasn't risen much over the freezing point since December of last year. I have been gathering weather reports from all over the world recently, and in every case there is a marked decline in mean temperatures—even in the tropics. Crops, in conse-

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